Folk Media and Tribal Development in Bihar

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The present study 'Folk Media and Tribal Development in Bihar' is a study on the role of media especially folk media in the developmental process of the studied tribal communities. The study has been carried out among three Scheduled Tribal (ST) communities namely *Santhal, Sauria Paharia* and *Kharwar* in Banka and Bhagalpur districts of Bihar. Tribals populations of Bihar, like any other part of the country, are Socio-economically lagging as compared to the general population and are in a far more disadvantageous position. The thesis is presented in six chapters, viz. Introduction, Folk Media and Tribe, Research Methodology, Profile of Study Area and People, Media and Tribal Development and Conclusion and Suggestions.

Introduction

The first chapter presents the premises of the study and tries to conceptualize the term tribe and addresses the definitional debate on the term tribe. It also presents the basic issues of tribal development, approaches and historical trajectory of policies for their development and mainstreaming. There has been a long debate on reaching some concrete definition of the term tribe by Anthropologists and other scholars. Unable to reach a consensus on the definition, the Anthropologists have come up with a list of characteristics for the group of people designated as tribe. According to Mazumdar (1944), "a tribe is a collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory and is not usually endogamous though originally it might have been so". Vidyarthi (1981) defines tribes as "a social group with the definite territory, common name, common culture, behaviour of an endogamous group, common taboos, existence of the distinctive social and political system, full faith in leaders and self-sufficiency in their distinct economy".

The essential characteristics of these communities are primitive traits, relative geographical isolation, distinct culture, shy of contact with community at large, and economically backward. Tribal communities live, in various ecological and geo-climatic conditions ranging from plains and forests to hills and inaccessible areas. More than ten crores (above 8 percent

of the total population) scheduled tribal population are distributed across the country. Some of the states, especially central India and north-eastern states have tribal dominated population. The total number of such tribal communities in India is 705. There are certain groups (75) of tribal population who are more backward and they are known as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). They are characterized by pre-agriculture level of technology, stagnant or declining population, extremely low literacy, and subsistence level of economy. India is home to one of the largest number of tribes in the world.

As far as the distribution of tribal communities in the state of Bihar is concerned, all the 32 types of scheduled tribal communities are available in the present-day Bihar. The total population of tribals in the state is only 13,36,573, which is merely 1.28 percent of the total population of the state. They are mainly concentrated in the districts of West Champaran, Jamui, Banka, Katihar, Purnea (Census, 2011). Demographically, Santhals and Tharu are the two most predominant tribal groups found in Bihar.

The problem and the basic issues of tribal development are not new. The governments after the independence from the colonial rule has been trying to devise some policies and welfare programmes for these groups of people. The broader approaches towards the issue of tribal development have also been changing. Historically the approaches towards administering the tribal areas have been oriented towards three main policies, i.e., 'policy of isolation', 'policy of assimilation' and 'policy of slow and steady integration'. The basic issues on tribal development include not only economic development, but also the preservation of their ethnic identity, ecology, language, traditional practices, etc. At the same time, empowerment of tribal population, fair distribution of income and wealth, health facilities, basic facilities like transportation, communication, and sanitation are also needed for the welfare of the STs. This can be possible only with the participation and involvement of tribals in project formulation and implementation by working through their traditional system (Vidyarthi, 1984; Deogaonkar, 1994; Verma, 1996; Singh, 2000; Mohanty, 2001; Gangele, 2019).

Folk Media and Tribes: An Overview

An elaborate description of the existing communication system of studied tribes, concepts of communication and media, different types of media including the traditional folk media and modern media, etc., are presented in the second chapter. This chapter also presents a concise account of the use of traditional media by the studied groups, availability, accessibility and use of modern media by them. The media and channels of communication are closely related

to participatory development. Communication is the process by which messages are transferred from a source to one or more receivers, with the intent to change the behaviour (Rogers, 1974). It can be verbal, non-verbal or through signs and expressions. There will be no communication unless a common understanding results from the exchange of information (Cheney, 2011).

Based on different attributes, communication has been classified into several types. One of the common typologies is based on the size of a social group which is intrapersonal, interpersonal, group and mass communication (Kumar, 2000). Intrapersonal communication is the communication with oneself. One receives signals that characterize one's own feelings or sensations (Wenburg and Wilmot, 1973). Interpersonal channels are those which involve a face-to-face message transfer between two or more individuals (Rogers, 1974). Group communication has almost similar virtues as interpersonal communication, but it always has a larger number of people involved in it. The communication system that reaches to massive numbers of people is known as mass communication (Danesi, 2009).

There are many types of media available to reach out to the target audience, such as print, electronic and digital media which belongs to modern mass media. On the other hand, folk media is the traditional way of communication among rural and tribal people. Folk media may be defined as "any form of endogenous communication system which by virtue of its origin from, and integration into a specific culture, serves as a channel for messages in a way and manner that requires the utilization of the values, symbols, institutions, and ethos of the host culture through its unique qualities and attributes" (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1998). Folk theatre, street plays, storytelling, folk song, folk dance, puppets, art work, painting, etc., are the popular means of folk media used among the tribal communities.

Research Methodology

The third chapter 'Research Methodology' gives a brief description of the methods and study tools and techniques used in completing this study. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data has been collected from the selected districts, i.e., Banka and Bhagalpur of the state by using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The data was collected by employing the interview schedule, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Observation method. Various aspects of the study were explored before actually conducting the fieldwork and data collection i.e., distribution and concentration of the studied tribes through the review of existing literature on the topic. The total sample size is 350 in which

150 respondents belong to Santhal, 100 each to Sauria Paharia and Kharwar. The districts, blocks and villages have been selected using the purposive random sampling method; while the respondents have been selected randomly from the villages.

The main purpose of this study is to know the socio-economic and developmental conditions of tribal people in the state and factors hindering their development with reference to communication. The specific objectives are:

- To study the status of socio-economic condition of the tribal and their participation in the development process;
- To study the development status of the tribal, different development programmes and schemes introduced by the Government, their awareness and acceptability of the development programmes;
- To explore and analyse the status of different forms of folk media existing among the studied tribes;
- To study the strength and popularity of the folk media in tribal society and role in the development process; and
- To suggest some measures based on the findings of the study for better participation of tribal in the development process through the use of folk media.

The study also attempts to figure out the most effective media for development communication so that tribal people can also participate in the development process and avail the development schemes.

Profile of Study Area and People

A detailed description of the studied area and communities is given in chapter four titled ‘Profile of Study Area and People’. The studied districts namely Banka and Bhagalpur are situated on the south-east side of Bihar State. The divisional headquarters of both districts is Bhagalpur. More than 77 percent of the total ST population of Banka district is Santhal. Santhal respondents have been selected from both Banka and Bhagalpur districts; whereas Sauria Paharia and Kharwar have been selected only from the Bhagalpur district.

The total population of the Santhal tribe in Bihar is 406076. The main occupation of the *Santhal* is agriculture. They also collect minor forest produces (MFPs). They prepare different utilitarian items from Sal tree, bamboos and other types of grasses, leaves and trees. They are skilled in arts and crafts and also have the skill of carpentry work. Their houses and

walls are decorated with colorful paintings. Dance and music are integral part of the Santhal life. On every occasion, they play musical instrument like *dhol, tamak, ghanta*, flute, *sarangi* etc. and sing and dance together. They enjoy their folk tradition and try to preserve it.

Sauria Paharia, the second studied tribe, belongs to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG). The total population of the *Sauria Paharia* tribe is 1932 in Bihar. *Sauria Paharia* lives in hills and has very poor socio-economic as well as health condition as compared to other tribal communities. Their main economic activity has been shifting cultivation, but it has changed now. Unemployment and poverty are the biggest problems for them. Folk songs and folk dances are the integral part of their life. They usually perform drama, dance and songs at different festivals and occasions, but they also sing and dance without any occasion.

The *Kharwar* is the third tribe and its total population in Bihar is 125811. The traditional occupation of the Kharwar is agriculture. They are also engaged in work based on forest activities, livestock, minor hunting, trapping and fishing. Kharwar are distributed in hilly and forest area as well as plains (Singh, 1998). Kharwars have witnessed huge changes in their lifestyle due to involvement in mainstream development activities. For example- they are very dedicated toward education and also favour female education.

Despite their direct dependence on cultivation, they are also engaged in daily wages on others' farms during the post-harvesting season. However, most of them are facing the problem of unemployment and do not have permanent source of income. The tribal families send their children to the government schools but are not much aware towards education. Tribes are also not much aware of sanitation and health problems. Problem of drinking water is a major factor for their illness. The condition of *Sauria Paharia* is worst among the studied groups. The toilet facility is also not available in most of the houses in the village. They do not have basic facilities in their house like, pure drinking water, proper drainage and sanitation system, electricity, road, health facilities etc. They are depended on quacks and home remedies for their treatment.

Media and Tribal Development

Chapter five 'Media and Tribal Development' presents the results, which are based on the primary data collected from the field. The total sample size is 350 and the total population is 1849 including 977 (52.8 percent) males and 872 (42.2 percent) females. More than half of the respondents (52.3 percent) are illiterate, maximum illiteracy (60 percent) is found among

the Sauria Paharia. The primary occupation of studied communities has changed with time as 43.4 percent have adopted daily wage labour due to lack of lands and other resources. The monthly income of half of the respondents' families is between Rs 3001-5000. Most of the houses of these tribal people are very low cost and made of locally available raw materials, such as bamboo, wood, straw, clay and sun-baked earthen tiles. Most of the respondents (64 percent) have Kachha houses, maximum (86.0 percent) among the Sauria Paharia.

Only one-third of the respondents have awareness towards the government development programmes and schemes. Majority (99.6 percent) of respondents are dependent on interpersonal communication for the information about schemes. They get information from Ward Members, Mukhiya, ASHA, Anganwadi workers, etc. The less use of folk media by the government may be the reason for poor awareness, as people have hardly the access and understanding towards modern mass media. Despite the extreme poverty situations, all the eligible households are not being covered by the food security schemes. Less than half of the respondents (47.7 percent) have saving account in some banks to receive the payments under MGNREGA.

Tribal groups in India are known for their skill in traditional art and craft, known as folk art. A little less than half (45.43 percent) of respondents have interest in their traditional art and craft work, but only 2.52 percent are able to derive economic benefits out of it. Santhals show the highest interest (78.67) in this regard. They draw different patterns and figurines of birds, animals, flowers, sun, etc., on the outer walls of their houses. Their paintings show the love for nature. They want some help in the form of training from the government to learn new strategy to market their products.

Regarding the interest and scope of mainstream media, only 10.3 percent of respondents read newspapers. Low literacy level, poverty and lack of interest are some major factors that are obstacles in accessing modern media. More than one-third of respondents (36.6 percent) listen to the radio. Out of those who have accessibility to radio, 63.3 percent of respondents have their own radio sets. TV has also become very popular these days, even in rural areas, but only 14.9 percent of respondents have access to television, whereas 39.7 percent of respondents have the accessibility to mobile or smart phones. At present, computer and internet along with the smart phones have also become very popular, but it still has very limited reach in the tribal areas (only 5.7 percent respondents are computer literate). Moreover, although the studied tribes want to use modern mass media, they do not have

access to these media. Poor economic condition is the biggest obstacle in availing these media as radio sets, television sets or newspapers require some amount to buy it. Television is the costliest among them, so have minimum access to the studied tribes. Also, most of the studied villages have problems of electricity, so electronic devices have little use in these villages. The educational levels of the tribal communities are very low, so reading newspapers or other printed materials are useless to them. Digital media is also not reachable to the studied tribes. They do not have much idea about computers and the internet. Most of them have not even seen a computer.

Most of the respondents said that they are availing Public Distribution System, Indira Awas Yojana, Old Age Pension, MGNREGA, Anganwadi and ANM workers' services, are prominent. They have limited access to the mass media, which is a key factor behind the poor conditions of studied tribes. For successful implementation of any development programme, participation of the beneficiary group is essential. Communication channels have the power to change the mindset of the people. Since tribes are living in remote areas, most of them are still isolated from the outer world. It is important to inform, educate, be aware and motivate tribal communities towards their development. The most important factor is to choose appropriate media for communicating and awakening the tribal communities.

We know there are several types of media being used for communication. The preference of media depends upon a number of factors, such as the accessibility to media channels, place of residence, types of society, education, cultural groups, contents of the media package, etc. Tribal people have limited exposure to different types of media, especially the modern mass media due to their limited availability and accessibility, different sets of cultural values and traditions, etc. This study also sought the opinions of tribal communities towards their preference for different types of media channels and programmes. It is important to note here that the respondents, especially from Santhals and Sauria Paharia communities are more inclined towards folk media, as these are easily accessible to them. This does not mean that they do not like modern media channels, but they are not able to access them due to poor economic conditions, lack of electricity connection and language barrier. Regarding the most popular form of media, a majority of Santhals (98.7 percent) and Sauria Paharia (95 percent) prefer folk media for entertainment and getting information on the development programmes and schemes. Street play is the second popular choice among them. Television and radio are

preferred more by Kharwar and Santhal (more than 60 percent), but mobile/smart phone are not much popular.

The study also sought respondents' opinion on the most effective media for awareness generation and information regarding various development programmes. 50.3 percent of the respondents believe that inter-personal communication could be the most beneficial for awareness generation among them. Tribal people trust the people who are known to them personally and they can also explain the information and message in their own language. Thus, the most effective medium to spread information or awareness generation among tribal communities is the folk media. Many respondents reveal that health and other development campaigns through folk media have been able to generate more awareness among them. Folk media-based campaigns are found to be popular among the studied tribes. The majority of respondents (72.6 percent) would like to watch and listen to programmes on folk music and songs as well as informative programmes on TV and radio. However, it is also found that the accessibility and reach of modern media are limited in rural areas, especially among the tribal population. Similar observations were made in the case studies and FGDs.

Traditional folk media can serve as an alternative to the mainstream mass media. Almost 74 percent of respondents have seen drama/puppet show/street show/add film in local fairs or market, villages, etc. Most of the Santhal (96 percent) and Sauria Paharia (94 percent) regularly participate in different forms of folk media like folk dance, folk song, drama, etc. Less than half of the respondents (46 percent) have received information about health, social, economic awareness, etc., through the folk media.

One of the important objectives of this study is to understand the existing different types of folk art, culture and media including traditional songs, music, dance and drama, paintings, etc. Santhal has a very rich tradition of folk art and craft and they are still very much connected to it. They dance, sing and play musical instruments in all types of festivals and ceremonies. They are also very good in art and craft and also well-versed in carpentry work. Sauria Paharia also has a rich tradition of folk songs, dances, religious rituals and social customs, etc. They use traditional musical instruments such as *Mandar, Nagara* (a type of drum), *Kartal, Bansuri* (flute), etc. Kharwar has tradition of folk culture, but they have been going through rapid changes. On marriages and other different socio-religious occasions and festivals, Kharwar women sing and dance. Male members also sing songs like Chaita, Holi

songs and Nirgun. Kharwar women sing folk songs in marriage ceremonies and also perform the ‘Jhumar’ dance.

Conclusion and Suggestions

All the three studied tribal groups are very poor. These tribal communities have very poor social, economic and developmental conditions. They have been lagging far behind the mainstream population. The efforts of the government have helped them to improve their socio-economic conditions, but failed to achieve the desired level of improvement. One of the major reasons for their backwardness is also poor communication with these tribal people, as the development measures failed to reach the intended beneficiaries due to lack of proper communication system. As agreed unanimously now, the development process should be participatory, for which it is essential to establish effective communication channels with tribal communities. The study reveals that socio-economic as well as health condition of studied tribes is not satisfactory.

This study has some recommendations that can be helpful in improving the performance of interventions aimed at uplifting the living standards of tribal communities. The already existing development programmes and schemes need to be re-advertised and re-communicated to them in a more effective manner. It has been found during the study that the message and information could not reach the intended beneficiaries, primarily due to lack of understanding. Thus, it is very important to communicate the right message to the beneficiaries with the use of a culturally appropriate medium. It has been observed that inter-personal communication and folk media are mostly used by the studied tribal communities. Tribal communities can easily connect with folk media and feel comfortable. The Government and non-government organizations must also use folk media to educate, motivate and generate awareness about a multitude of issues including health, sanitation, education, and any other socio-economic and political aspects. It appears from the study that many tribal people easily understand the theme of the drama, folk song or folk dance performed as parts of the awareness campaign.

It has been observed from the study that the studied tribes are skilled in different types of folk media as well as craftwork. Government should not only provide a platform to showcase their work, but should also try to generate livelihood opportunities wherever possible. Government can provide a platform to perform the folk arts of the studied communities and they should

also be provided some financial benefits for that. Tribal paintings and craftwork, especially of Santhals have good demand outside the tribal areas, especially in cities and towns.

Development communication that is based on collaboration between the folk media and the mass media can have a far-reaching impact. This is also revealed by the respondents that they like modern media, but since they have limited access and understanding, they prefer more folk media. The government should make parallel efforts to increase the reach of modern mass media to the tribal communities. The community radios and TV can play an important role to make the studied tribal populations more aware. For any successful awareness campaign and information drive, proper packaging of media is essential. Participation of local people and community members in designing the media campaign can be very helpful as the local people may provide insights for making the media more effective and useful. The involvement of local tribal people in the development communication, will not only increase their participation in awareness generation campaigns and reaching to a larger group of people, but it will also benefit them directly and indirectly in recognizing and reviving their traditional art and culture. This will also have an additional advantage of increased participation in the developmental activities and mainstreaming them.